

# Regional Planning Advisory Council

Minutes of Wednesday, November 9, 2016

## Minutes

### RPAC Members Attending:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Representing</u>
1. Becky Adams	Arkansas Department of Health (ADH)
2. Marcia Cook	City of Sherwood
3. Charles Cummings (Chair)	Freight/Goods Movement
4. Coreen Frasier	Bicycle Advocacy of Central Arkansas (BACA)
5. Becca Green	Rock Region METRO
6. Mark Grimmett	City of Bryant
7. Sybil Hampton	City of Little Rock
8. Paul Hastings	City of Little Rock
9. Jeff Hathaway	Little Rock Regional Chamber of Commerce (LRRCC)
10. Todd Larson	City of North Little Rock
11. Sara McClain	City of Benton
12. Bob Lyford	City of Little Rock
13. Buckley O'Mell (Alt.)	LRRCC
14. Bernadette Rhodes	City of North Little Rock
15. Carolyn Shearman (Alt.)	Sierra Club
16. Paul Simms	AHTD
17. Patrick Stair	Sierra Club
18. Jack Stowe	City of Maumelle
19. Regina Taylor	Youth Outreach
20. Brad Walker	City of Little Rock

### Guests:

1. Ben Browning	AHTD
2. Chris Madison	City of Bryant
3. Noel Oman	<i>Arkansas Democrat-Gazette</i>
4. Emmily Tiampati	AHTD
5. Keli Wylie	AHTD

### Metroplan Staff:

1. Casey Covington	CARTS Planning Director
2. Susan Dollar	Transportation Planner/Title VI Coordinator
3. Daniel Holland	Planner
4. Richard Magee	Deputy Director
5. Jim McKenzie	Executive Director

### 1. Call to Order and Announcements

Chairman Charles Cummings called the meeting to order at 11:30 AM. The Council met at 501 W. Markham Street, Little Rock.

## 2. Minutes of Previous Meetings

The Council considered the Minutes of October 12, 2016.

**MOTION** by Mr. Hathaway, second by Mr. Stowe

"To accept the Minutes of October 12, 2016, as prepared."

**PASSED**

## 3. Jump Start

Mr. Holland, who coordinates Metroplan Jump Start program, presented information on the Jump Start program.

Jump Start was one of the deliverables of the *Imagine Central Arkansas* project.

The goals of the Jump Start program are to provide proof of concept that environmentally sustainable developments can be profitable to build for the private sector, and economically sustainable for the public sector. The plans that arise from these initial neighborhoods will develop the region's experience and knowledge base for creating more livable communities and serve as a catalyst for further development in the region.

Recipients of Jump Start grants are required to produce certain deliverables, including redefining what types of uses and development is allowed within the Jump Start area. This may be accomplished in any number of ways, but must be addressed through the community's zoning and subdivision codes.

Another requirements is to collect and submit data on an annual basis. The purpose of asking communities to collect data is so that the jurisdiction and Metroplan staff can evaluate how well the measures are working and how they are being implemented.

Mr. Holland reviewed the Jump Start projects to indicate how each community addressed its codes and how they related to the initial applications that were submitted. The communities of chose to completely rework their zoning and subdivision codes, working closely with Metroplan staff. The City of Little Rock established an overlay district. The City of Vilonia has yet to revise its existing codes. Some communities are further along in data collection than others. Communication with staff is ongoing.

Following the presentation, the Council discussed the projects.

**Mr. Holland:** We will need a vote on these projects, but first, Casey will you summarize what staff has done?

**Mr. Covington:** Detailed information on these projects is available online.

We evaluated the Jump Start communities as staff before presenting them to the Council. Ultimately, we felt that all of the communities, with the exception of Vilonia, have met the expectations that were laid out for them, although some are further along than others.

Regarding North Little Rock's Park Hill project, the inability to repurpose the vacant elementary school was of great concern. Staff worked with the Park Hill community for many months to help make its project acceptable even without the repurposing of the school.

So at this point, our recommendation would be to (1) go back to Vilonia and continue working with that community to bring it up to standard so that it can proceed to the next level, and (2) allow the other communities to move forward with their infrastructure projects.

**Mr. Cummings:** Do we need to address Vilonia in this Motion?

**Mr. Covington:** Yes, you will need to address Vilonia.

**Mr. Magee:** Before you vote, I would also like to address this subject. The whole intent of Jump Start was to create areas where development could occur in ways that otherwise could not, under current codes. The intent was to rework current codes - zoning and subdivision - to allow development and uses to occur that will advance the vision and goals expressed in *Imagine Central Arkansas*, and that were actually made illegal some 30 or 40 years ago. Each jurisdiction took a different approach to this task. Some literally rewrote the entire code as recommended by the consultant. North Little Rock, for example, reassessed every use allowed in that code and created new zoning districts specifically for Park Hill and Levy. The City of Little Rock took a different approach by leaving the base zoning as is and establishing an overlay district that included all the structural components of Jump Start. In effect, the City said, "You may continue your current uses, but if you go to change that, then you must meet the new code." So, Metroplan did not dictate how communities would address the codes, but whatever approach they took had to foster the objectives of *Imagine Central Arkansas*. And that is the question you need to ask yourselves before you vote on this: Did each of these communities take steps to rework their zoning and subdivision codes so that the end result will foster the vision, goals and objectives set forth in *Imagine Central Arkansas*? Will it allow development to occur that will actually change those areas? That's what we are asking you guys to determine. If you agree that, yes, they have done that, then we ask you to vote to recommend those communities to the Metroplan Board. Pending Board action, those communities will then move on to Phase 2, which is engineering/design of the actual improvements to infrastructure along those major streets. If on the other hand, you feel that some communities did not meet the standard set forth in Jump Start, then your vote should reflect that as well.

**Mr. Cummings:** Thank you, Richard. May we have a Motion so that we can discuss this?

**MOTION** by Ms. Rhodes, second by Ms. Green

"To recommend the Jump Start projects to the Metroplan Board of Directors."

**Discussion:** Following is a summary of the discussion.

**Mr. Stair:** From what I understand, it sounds like Vilonia is lacking in this - in everything from a car-restricted area to allowing car-oriented businesses to requiring low-density. I would hate to reward that by using our money to fund more of the same kind of old-style development we already have in this area. The other communities, by contrast, seem to have been thorough and whole-hearted in their approaches.

From my personal take, I would like to see Vilonia excluded from this Motion, although I am open to being convinced otherwise.

**Ms. Frasier:** One of the elements in Little Rock's Jump Start project is a Complete Streets treatment of the 12<sup>th</sup> Street corridor. Little Rock has adopted a Complete Streets policy; however, the city is not enforcing the policy in other areas of the city, so why should I have confidence that the Jump Start area will be implemented as specified?

**Mr. Cummings:** Would someone like to speak to that question?

**Mr. Magee:** I will speak to that question. We will hold the cities to what they have committed to implementing within the Jump Start area. It goes back down to the vision and to the application, where the cities stated what they intended to do. We will judge them against that application and if they said they were going to implement a Complete Streets policy, then that is what will be engineered. If a city chooses to step back and renege from that commitment, then we will reassess whether the engineering phase will move forward. If at any point in this process, a jurisdiction chooses to renege on its commitment to do what it agreed to in the application, Metroplan will not fund the next phase of the project.

**Ms. Frasier:** So, will Metroplan oversee these Jump Start projects and make sure they are adhering to the codes?

**Mr. Magee:** Metroplan will be more involved in overseeing some jurisdictions' work. Other jurisdictions, such as Bryant, are under separate contract for the engineering; however, we will still review the progress before moving to the next phase. Per the request of other jurisdictions, Metroplan will be intimately involved throughout the entire process. Either way, the projects will not move to construction unless they are deemed consistent with the vision adopted by each community and with the application they submitted. For example, the City of North Little Rock's Park Hill Jump Start was held up for a time, because the vision articulated in the application focused on the repurposing of the former Park Hill Elementary School; that was critical to the community vision. For a variety of reasons, the City wanted to opt out of that element, but Metroplan insisted it be included if the project were to move to the next phase. Now, a jurisdiction can adopt whatever it wants, but Metroplan will not fund a Jump Start project that does not meet the standards set forth in the application and community vision.

**Mr. Holland:** I want to point out that these zoning and subdivision codes are legally binding. Whether or not they are routinely enforced is a little beyond our scope. Our objective is to make sure that the codes allow the kind of development necessary to foster sustainable communities.

**Mr. Stair:** But what you are basically saying, in the case of Little Rock, is that if it does not adopt a Complete Streets policy, it will not receive funding?

**Mr. Magee:** Little Rock has clearly indicated a Complete Street element on the corridor. If, when the engineering begins to design those elements, the city were to object or back out of that commitment to Complete Streets, then we would reassess, and withhold the funding for the project.

**Mr. McKenzie:** Just to be clear, we are not requiring Little Rock to adopt a Complete Streets policy for the entire city, but those standards will be applied to the Jump Start area.

**Mr. Holland:** The application criteria does not specify Complete Streets. It does require that streets be designed to incorporate pedestrian-friendly and bike-friendly elements. That doesn't necessarily mean Complete Streets, but it does mean that the infrastructure has to include, at a minimum, those pedestrian and bike elements.

**Ms. Frasier:** Little Rock has adopted a Complete Streets policy for the city. However, it is haphazardly enforced - "extenuating circumstances" are often cited whenever a new street is reviewed. The enforcement depends on the vote of the City Board, which was my initial concern.

**Mr. Cummings:** Are there other questions before we vote?

**Ms. McClain:** Is there someone here from Vilonia, who can speak to its project?

**Mr. Covington:** Jurisdictional representatives on RPAC are determined by population. Small cities are represented by the county appointee. For example, the City of Wrightsville is represented on by Pulaski County's appointees. In the case of Vilonia, the Faulkner County appointee is not present today.

**Mr. Magee:** If you choose to exclude Vilonia today, that does not mean that the city cannot at some point reapply for funding. All you are indicating by your vote today is that Vilonia is not consistent with its application and is not ready to move forward with the next phase.

**Mr. Stair:** I would like to offer the following amendment to this Motion:

**MOTION TO AMEND** by Mr. Stair, second by Ms. Frasier

"To add the words 'with the exception of the City of Vilonia' to the previous Motion."

**PASSED**

**MOTION (AS AMENDED)**

"To recommend the Jump Start projects to the Metroplan Board of Directors, with the exception of the City of Vilonia."

**PASSED**

**Mr. Cummings:** Thank you for the good discussion of this subject, and thanks to Daniel for his presentation of the issues.

#### **4. I-30 Project Update**

Mr. Ben Browning, of the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department, updated the Council on the status of the proposed I-30 Crossing project.

**Mr. Cummings:** Ben, it's always good to have you with us. We appreciate all the information that you share with us. You have been very consistent about coming to us, and appreciate your and the Department's efforts to keep us updated.

**Mr. Browning:** We are always glad to come here, and appreciate the invitation. I don't have a PowerPoint this time, because there's not a whole lot to show you. We've been doing a lot in the interim since we were last here, but it's still in process. Therefore, I will walk you through where we are now and what still lies ahead.

As you know, we are still in the middle of the NEPA process - the National Environmental Policy Act - and there's a lot of stuff we are working on in regard to that. Not only are we working on the decision document, we are also working on the technical reports that will go into that document - for example, regarding noise, traffic, air quality, wetlands, floodplains. There are many things that go into that process.

We are still looking at the spring of 2017, before we will have a draft of the environmental decision document. Once we have a draft document, it will be reviewed by the Federal Highway Administration and then once it gives us the OK to take that draft to the public, we will hold a public hearing where the public will have an opportunity review the draft and make comments on it. The hearing will be conducted in the same manner as we have conducted the other hearings. From that point forward, we will continue to work with Federal Highway Administration to finalize that environmental decision document. Again, the draft document will most likely be available for internal review in the spring of next year, then probably sometime in the late summer or early fall we will be ready to hold a public hearing.

Concurrent with that effort is the Section 106 effort. Section 106 is a Federal Highway Administration consultation process that is mostly related to impacts on historic properties. We are in the middle of also going through that consultation process, working closely with the State Historic Preservation officer. That office has given us a list of consulting parties, representatives from all across the corridor. We've already had one meeting, and will probably have another sometime around the first of the year. We are consulting with them with regard to what impacts they believe may occur in areas adjacent to the I-30 corridor project. We will be looking at all the alternatives currently presented, to determine what if any impacts may occur and possible mitigations to those impacts. We are working on producing a "Programmatic Agreement." A Programmatic Agreement is an agreement that the relationship among the AHTD, the FHWA, the State Historic Preservation Office and also the Advisory Council of Historic Preservation, which will formalize the agreed-upon agreements, not only through the NEPA phase, but throughout the life of the project. This Programmatic Agreement is especially significant because this is a design-build project, and any changes that take place during the design or build portions could potentially alter the impacts on historic properties. The Programmatic Agreement allows for a very fluid process throughout the project. We anticipate a Programmatic Agreement sometime later next year, signed by all parties.

Design-build procurement is also ongoing. This is a lengthy process before we even enter into a contract with the design-builder. I've talked with the RPAC several times in the past. We are using a two-stage procurement process. First, we will issue a Request for Qualifications (RFQ), followed by a Request for Proposals (RFP). We are still looking at late

spring of next year before we release the Request for Qualifications. That document is nearing completion now and undergoing refinement. This will be a national search for qualified design-build firms. There will be a couple of months for responding firms to submit their applications. AHTD will evaluate and score the applications and arrive at four - preferably three - design-build firms who will be invited to submit a formal Proposal under the guidelines provided in the Request for Proposals. The Request for Proposals is a much longer and much more complicated document and will require intensive work to produce. As we advertise for Qualifications, we will continue to work on the Request for Proposals. This will be a several-thousand page document, but it is necessary because it defines the parameters in which the design-builder must deliver the project and what we are looking for as far as is submitted. We are putting in the safeguards to make sure we will get the project we want. We have a lot of experts from around the nation who have a lot of experience with design-build projects, and who are lending their expertise to this effort. The Department feels that we will have a robust set of procurement documents at the end of this process. We will continue to refine those documents throughout the coming months, and will look to releasing the RFP late 2017 or early 2018. Firms will have six months to respond with their Proposals.

As with the RFQs, the Department will review, evaluate and score the Proposals. After we have selected a design-builder and entered into contract negotiations, a Notice to Proceed will be issued, which permits the design-builder to finalize the design and begin construction. This will likely occur probably in later 2018 or early 2019.

Concurrent with that process, the AHTD will be working with the cities of Little Rock and North Little Rock to produce the agreements between the Department and those entities, on what they want to see in the project, and what things they are willing to partner with us financially in order to get. The final agreement will outline expectations and responsibilities; it will be critically important as we enter into contract, so that the design-builder clearly knows what is wanted, and who is responsible. This will also help in the event of any changes to project, in that we will know who we need to bring to the table to discuss the change request.

We are also working on a "table of critical items" that we as the Department want the design-builder to really focus on, so that those items will make it all the way through the process in accordance with our expectations. The design-builder will have to report at every juncture in the project on what he has done with regard to the items on the table.

A lot of controls are going into these documents. They are being thoroughly reviewed by several different counsels for legal sufficiency, and of course FHWA is at the table with us.

So, while I don't have a lot to show you today, know that there is a lot going on behind the scene. We are continuing to chug along with this process. The process is long and arduous, with many pieces.

As far as the RPAC's work, there are a couple of more steps for you. As I believe Casey has outlined for you, around the first of the year. First, we need to amend the long-range plan. The plan already has the project listed, but does not describe the type of work to be done. We've been working with Metroplan on this. In fact, last week we had a traffic modeling workshop, where we brought FHWA professionals, AHTD staff, the consultants and Casey

and Jim together so that we could walk through the traffic models and address concerns that were raised. We had an open dialogue. As a result, there are several things we will be refining, but I think we were able to get somewhat close to the same page regarding what the traffic modeling is showing.

I think Casey will be able to take some of that and use it as he develops a systems impact analysis, building on what Metroplan had previously done. That analysis is a step that Metroplan wants to do prior to acting on a request for plan amendment. We will be working with them in that effort and hopefully will be ready to bring the request for plan amendment to the RPAC shortly after the first of the year.

We will also be working with Metroplan and the Federal Highway Administration to determine what information is needed to take the final step, which is an amendment to the TIP and STIP to add the work description (major widening) to the job that is already listed. That is the final step you will take, and we will be working with the FHWA and Metroplan to see what else needs to be done before we can bring that request forward.

We will keep you apprised of the timeline with regard to the draft decision document, draft EA and other steps along the process. We are entering into a lull as we approach the holiday season but there will be plenty going on internally within the Department.

With that said, do you have any questions?

**Mr. Lyford:** Ben, please clarify the timing of the TIP and STIP amendments after the amendment the long-range plan?

**Mr. Browning:** At the first of the year, we'll ask for a long-range plan amendment. Between now and then, we will be working with Metroplan staff to find out what steps they want to take in preparation for that request around the first of the year. The traffic modeling workshop was a critical step toward giving them the information they need to run the systems impact analysis. After that is done, I believe that that will give us the foundation to move forward with the request for plan amendment.

**Mr. Covington:** That's correct. That's why we set the next meeting for January 18<sup>th</sup>. We believe that between now and then staff will be able to put some this together and develop a better timeline for you. As Ben said, from our standpoint, the biggest concern is the systems impact analysis. Until we get that and assess it, discuss it with AHTD - and we also want the FHWA involved in determining what those system impacts are and what we are required to consider as part of our long-range transportation plan in with us on those discussions, as to what those system impacts will be, and a big part of that will be the additional widenings that could result from that project, and once we know that then we can bring that to this Council and then I think we will have enough information to at least begin that dialogue.

**Mr. Lyford:** Once that first amendment takes place, what is the timing of the second request, the one for the TIP/STIP amendment?

**Mr. Covington:** Some of that will depend on how long it takes to consider the first amendment.

**Mr. Lyford:** But assume the first amendment has been done. How long before the second request for amendment will be brought forward?

**Mr. McKenzie:** Let me address that. When we originally worked out a timeline we assumed that the Environmental Assessment would also include a preferred alternative; and once the preferred alternative was identified then the local officials could decide whether they supported it or not. If they did we could pass the TIP amendment. The TIP is the last point of control the local officials have on the process.

As the EA has developed there is a possibility that it will not specify a single preferred alternative, but instead will leave that recommendation to FHWA. FHWA won't make that decision until after the project is on the TIP/STIP and so there's a gray area between those two points. At some point in those discussion everybody - the local officials, the Federal Highway Administration officials - will get comfortable enough for the local officials to say, yes we support what is being proposed, and therefore we can move forward with the TIP amendment. We expect that sometime in the late spring.

**Mr. Browning:** To follow-up with Jim, when are we going to get that preferred alternative? We don't know. That's what this whole process is for. The preferred alternative may be in the draft EA; it may be in the final EA; it may be an FHWA determination. There is a lot of uncertainty and a lot of steps between now and the preferred alternative determination.

A preferred alternative is not required before amending the TIP and STIP. Metroplan staff and Board would prefer to have an alternative before making that amendment. We are working with staff, with the Metroplan Board, with the FHWA, to see how those pieces will come together to amend the TIP. We want everybody to feel comfortable before moving forward.

**Mr. Lyford:** Please describe the project as it is now.

**Mr. Browning:** It is 6.7 mile project that goes from south terminal through on I-30, through the eastern edge of Little Rock, replaces the Arkansas River Bridge, along I-30 through North Little Rock to the I-40/I-30 interchange north terminal, then east over to the interchange at 67/167. It's improving all those interchanges. There's six major interchanges within that 6.7 miles, so the five-fold purpose is to: improve the infrastructure, bridge replacement, mobility and safety in that corridor, so it's really looking at opportunities for doing that.

Through both the Planning and Environmental Linkages process we started in 2014, and the current ongoing NEPA we've developed three alternatives. A no-build, which pretty much says, "Nothing can be done under this project; we'll cancel this project, release the funds and address the project at a later date."

The second one we're looking at in NEPA would be what we call the "eight-lane alternative," which would really be adding one additional lane in each direction to help with that mobility between those interchanges.

And then the third one is what we are calling the "six-lane plus CD" which really keeps three lanes in each direction all the way through, but adds two additional lanes on either side for the entire length of the corridor for additional mobility between those interchanges that feed ultimately into a collector-distributor system at the Arkansas River Bridge crossing, which means that the outside decision lanes are separated from the through-lanes by a concrete barrier to improve safety in those heavily congested interchange areas.

So that's the project that is being considered in NEPA right now, those three alternatives.

**Mr. Lyford:** Has the Highway Department said which one it prefers?

**Mr. Browning:** The Highway Department doesn't have a preference. The Highway Department allows the process to determine that, and then when one has come out to show that it has more "pros" than "cons" over the rest, then we will tell FHWA that based on all the data that have been collected and presented, we believe that it is the preferred design. We are not at that point yet; we don't have enough information. When we do, Federal Highways will either agree or disagree with the decision made by AHTD.

**Mr. McKenzie:** Just to expand on that a little. Of the two "build" alternatives, there are two variations of each one of those alternatives that have to do with the interchange on the south side of the river. Both for the six-lane CD and the eight-lane alternatives, the interchange at Cantrell would be replaced with a Single Point Urban Interchange" (SPUI), and then another where that interchange would be replaced with a split-diamond interchange. So essentially you have four variations of the build alternative, plus the no-build alternative that are being looked at.

**Mr. Browning:** That's correct

**Mr. Lyford:** And on the no-build alternative, does that include replacing the bridge as currently designed?

**Mr. Browning:** It does not. No-build is truly *nothing built*. The project - CA 0602 - is canceled and the funds are released for another project or projects.

That doesn't mean that nothing will ever be done. Eventually the bridge will have to be replaced. There is some funding available now for replacing the bridge - not enough, and we would have to wait until additional funds became available. I imagine that if the project were canceled now, the next project would be to just replace the bridge. Additional improvements along the corridor would have to be looked at as separate projects, so there would probably be a series of four or five projects spread out over 15 years or so. Canceling the project now would also mean starting a whole new environmental process with each project, whole new planning process. The same questions we are asking now would come back again.

**Mr. Lyford:** For both the build alternatives, do the plans provide specifics on which streets have access to the freeway?

**Mr. Browning:** Yes, all the streets are identified and the schematics are available online at the AHTD website, [www.30crossing.com](http://www.30crossing.com), and we also have 3-D animations that are focused

just on that downtown area. The downtown area is more complicated and the 3-D animations help to visualize how the traffic patterns would form.

**Mr. Lyford:** My last question: What is the status of the Memorandum of Understanding between Little Rock, North Little Rock, and the AHTD? And does this memo include design schematics?

**Mr. Browning:** We haven't actually started that yet. We've just received some draft agreements - we call them "partnering agreements." This is something we do across the state. The agreement will outline who is responsible for what and who will be paying for what. As I said, I just received some drafts from our Program Management Division and so we'll refine those drafts and send them to the cities and we will start the negotiation based on what they would like to see included in those drafts. If the City of Little Rock wants certain things to be included, it would have to be included in the agreements. I believe that the City of Little Rock Board of Directors just recently voted to extend the contract with the consultant it hired at the beginning of this process, so that consultant will be working with us throughout the project.

**Mr. Lyford:** Will the Partnering Agreements be specific as to what will occur at the interchange entrances and exits?

**Mr. Browning:** It really has more to do - rather than changing the schematics - with what kind of design elements they want to see. For example, do they want a higher-cost type of lighting, or bridge railing enhancements, or other enhancements that are outside the normal scope of work, those elements would have to be specified. The design-builder would then know that the design in those areas is mandated and inflexible.

**Mr. Lyford:** Would that include landscaping and vegetation?

**Mr. Browning:** Yes, absolutely.

**Mr. Stair:** So as I understand it, the NEPA and the Environmental Assessment are still underway, and we don't yet know whether we will have a FONSI coming or another step before we get to the plan and TIP amendments. Are we going to have that information before we are asked to determine whether to amend the long-range plan?

**Mr. Browning:** No. The environmental document will probably not even be at a draft stage by the time we ask for a plan amendment. That will be based on the current schematics that are already out in the public and are being considered. We would only be asking for the description "major widening" to be added to the existing project line item. You will have access to some version of that environmental decision document by the time we get to the TIP/STIP amendment step.

**Mr. Stair:** I hope this is something we will discuss in January. Casey and Jim may have to address this question, that of how we, the RPAC, can make a knowledgeable decision without having all the details. The results of the EA could have a huge affect on the kind of amendment we make, or if we want an amendment. We need solid information, not just conjecture or drafts.

**Mr. Browning:** Even though you won't access to the final or even draft environmental decision document, we have much information already available, which we would be happy to share with you. If you have specific questions, we will give you whatever information we have.

**Mr. Cummings:** One other thing, for the sake of clarification: If we change the current policy on our long-range transportation plan from the current six-lane cap, won't that have a major impact on much of the rest of the plan? It's not just a simple changing of one or two lines of writing; that policy affects so much of the plan. We would need to look at and re-work the entire structure of the plan.

**Mr. Covington:** Originally, AHTD did ask us to repeal the entire six-lane policy. The recommendation is not to move forward with the request to remove the policy, but to consider only the exception requested for this portion of the corridor.

As part of our normal procedures in updating the long-range plan, we will again examine the whole policy in 2018. Should that policy be eliminated, we would be looking at a major plan revision.

Again, at this point we are only looking at an exception from the south terminal to north terminal and over to Hwy 67. One of the reasons for that is that Metroplan is partnering with the AHTD to conduct a study of High Occupancy Toll (HOT) lanes, which will start sometime next year. We will be looking at options for adding lanes that would not be general-purpose lanes, but would be market-based lanes. The result of that and other studies would be considered as part of our re-examination of the six-lane policy. Questions we would ask include: Would we keep it as is? Eliminate the policy altogether? Modify the policy?

**Mr. Cummings:** Thank you, Casey. Ben has another obligation and will have to leave us shortly. Are there any other questions for Ben before he leaves?

**Dr. Adams:** To follow-up on other comments, it sounds as though there will be a lot of very good information available at the end of this process. Is there any reason we can't wait until then, when all the information has been developed and made available, before making a decision? Is there a technical reason?

**Mr. Browning:** A lot of it does have to do with the length of time required for each step of the process. While schedule is not the most important thing in the process, it is still not something we can disregard. When we are in the middle of a procurement process, everything has to be lined up very specifically. A lot of different things are happening at the same and timing is essential.

Another reason scheduling is critical is that our budget does not grow; it is fixed. With inflation, the longer it takes to get a project to construction, the less building power you have. You are losing purchasing power. If we delay by two years, we could lose ten to fifteen percent purchasing power, which means we can't do as much in the corridor.

Having said all that, if we were to wait until the very end to start that first decision-making step, there would be a six or eight month delay in starting the procurement process. Our

goal in talking with Metroplan staff is to see if we can start making some of those decisions at different steps along the way. We want things to move fluidly, without dead time in the schedule. that will be discussion that takes place with the RPAC, and the Metroplan Board of Directors. Will you have sufficient information? We feel you will have sufficient information to make an educated decision.

**Dr. Hampton:** I'm rather startled whenever I hear you talk, because it's surprising that the decisions you are asking of us could be such a major piece of what you are putting together, that it could not be tweaked. So much of the structure of that will be the same, whether it's six lanes or eight lanes or ten lanes. So I am surprised that there is a push for decision-making with really limited information on items that some of us consider to be important.

**Mr. Browning:** First, I'm sorry if I make you sad. I don't mean to make anybody sad when I talk. Second, understand what we are coming to you for. We are not asking for a decision on the design, because either alternative will require an exception to the six lane policy. So when you make that decision, you are really answering the question, "Can this project even move forward?" We believe you have enough information to make that decision. If you don't believe you have that information, you can make the decision that it is not ready to move forward. The alternative is the no-build.

**Dr. Hampton:** I understand that we're not being asked to make a decision between eight and ten lanes, I understand that. I am concerned that something of major import is about to happen to our community, and the process has not felt right.

**Mr. Browning:** I apologize for that. We try to be as transparent as possible. We've tried to come out and share with you. We've had six public meetings, three times more than we normally have on a project, and we've done all we think we can. We understand that this is a unique project, and we've done all we can in the public involvement process.

**Dr. Hampton:** The public deserves to have an opportunity to be involved, and I think the Department has been responsive to the fact that this is a different time, and that at this time and in the future people expect public entities to be engaged with its public.

**Mr. Browning:** Absolutely. That's what we have tried to do. I understand that it comes down to different people having different perspectives. From our perspective, we feel we have been very open and incorporated a lot of public input, Our last public meeting resulted in over 1,400 comments. All comments and AHTD responses have been posted and cross-referenced on [30crossing.com](http://30crossing.com).

**Mr. Covington:** As staff we have asked ourselves, what information do we need to make these decisions? Over the next month, we will be talking with the Federal Highway Administration, with AHTD, and others. I don't know that we will have all the answers, but I believe that by January 18<sup>th</sup>, when we meet, we will at least have enough information to discuss. From today's discussion, it's clear that that needs to happen on the 18<sup>th</sup>.

**Mr. Browning:** Exactly as Casey said, we will not be coming in here saying, "Here's the information, now make a decision." We will be saying, "Here's the information. Let's talk." I apologize for leaving, but I have another obligation. Thank you for inviting me today. I am available to anyone, anytime, so please don't hesitate to call me. I am happy to talk.

**Mr. Cummings:** Thank you again, Ben. We appreciate your time. Are there other questions or comments from the Council?

**Mr. Stair:** When the Department mentions "expense of delay," we've not gone over a two percent inflation rate in the last ten years or so. A delay is not nearly as costly as it used to be, and should not be a crucial factor in our consideration of this project.

**Mr. Hathaway:** I beg to differ. The cost of construction materials has not been consistent with the general inflation rate. Those costs go up significantly.

**Mr. Stowe:** When we built a traffic light in Maumelle, the cost went from fairly low to very high, because Hurricane Katrina hit Louisiana and we couldn't get the pipe that was needed. Sometimes cost is not tied to inflation, but to other external things that cannot be predicted.

**Mr. McKenzie:** The plan is a 20-year plan and is typically painted in pretty broad strokes. For example, we know that Highway 5 parallels I-30 out to Benton; we know it needs to be widened, so we put "widen Highway 5" in the plan, in order to make some plan-level cost estimates. Now that we get down to a project in Bryant, the Highway Department says it would like to do a five-lane cross-section in the middle of town; the City of Bryant says no, we want a median-divided cross-section with trees, pedestrian crossings and all kinds of stuff. That negotiation is handled before the project gets on the TIP/STIP for construction. There are levels of detail that are appropriate at each stage of project development. Somebody asked the question, would we have enough detail to recommend a plan amendment. As large and complicated as this project is, and as involved and concerned as I know each of you to be, I can pretty much guarantee that you will not have as much detail as you want. You want to know what is going to be built in specific detail, and you won't have it because the project hasn't made it to that level yet.

**Mr. Cummings:** Thank you, Jim. The Council is on an interesting journey. Is there other business to come before the Council?

## **5. Other Business**

Mr. Covington announced that a reception to honor Jim McKenzie's retirement from Metroplan will be held on Wednesday, December 14<sup>th</sup>, at Metroplan. Council members should be receiving invitations (via post mail) shortly.

## **6. Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be at 11:30 AM, on Wednesday, January 18, 2017. Confirmation and meeting material will be sent at least one week prior to the date.

## **7. Adjourn**

With no further business brought forward, the Chairman asked for motion to adjourn.

**MOTION** by Ms. Taylor, second by Ms. Green  
"To adjourn."

**Council adjourned at 1:09 PM**